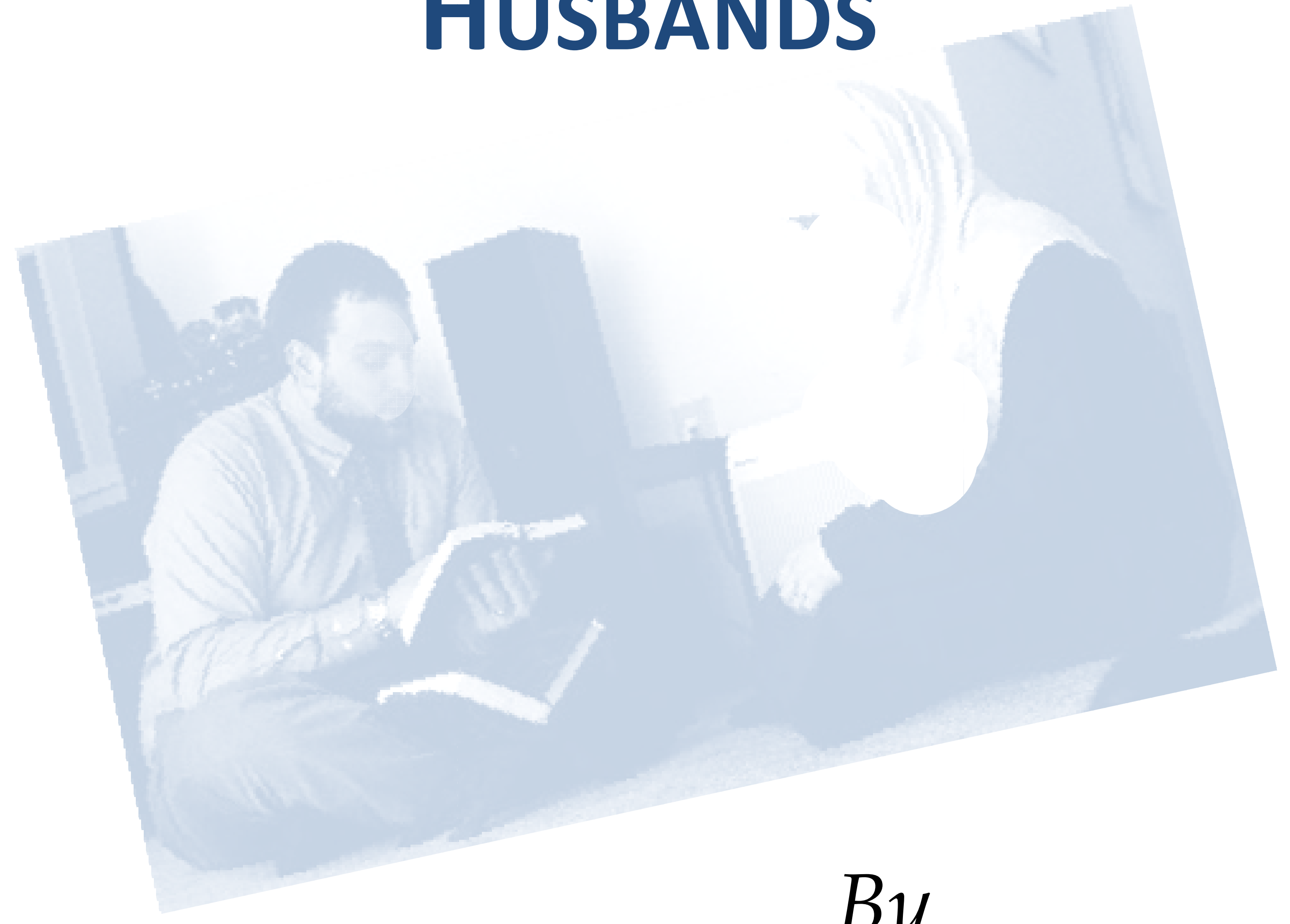
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Presents:

Muslim Women who Taught their Husbands



By

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Introduction

I can almost feel the shock when your eyes fell upon the title – 'Muslim Women who Taught their Husbands'!? This shock most probably stemmed from the sad state of affairs many Muslims find themselves in today.

Muslim Women today may not teach their husbands because:

1. They don't have that sort of knowledge to teach their husbands full stop.
2. The husband does not want to learn from his wife (how embarrassing *my* wife teaching *me*!).
3. One or both parties are just too busy to take time out to sit together and learn the *deen*[1] of Allah.
4. One or both parties have no or little interest in studying Islaam.

Yet the Muslims of yesterday were very different from the Muslims of today. There was a time when both husband and wife would sit together with a common love for the knowledge of this *deen*. Those acquainted with Islamic knowledge will know that the scholars of the past were such that they would travel for months in pursuit of just one *hadeeth* of the Prophet ﷺ. For such men having a scholar as a wife was one of the greatest blessings in this world and a source of respect and honour.

How notorious it is then for someone to label the Scholars of Islaam as patriarchal and misogynist? Sadly, as the world is turning, ignorance is spreading; the Modernists (from whom branch out the 'Islamic Feminists') call for the re-interpretation of the words of Allah, his Prophet ﷺ and Islamic Jurisprudence as a whole, claiming that the Islaam we find today is the result of male opinions, thoughts and ideas.

To all those who believe it is degrading to learn from your wife
To all those who say that Muslim Women had no role in the spread of knowledge,
To all those who say Islaam is a misogynist and patriarchal religion,
To all those women who seek to change Islamic Jurisprudence claiming it is andocentric,

I dare you to read on.

Fatimah bint al-Mundhir ibn al-Zubayr ibn al 'Awaam

Asma is a well-known figure in Islamic history; not only was she the daughter of Abu Bakr and the sister of Aishah but she was the obedient wife of the Sahabi Zubayr ibn al 'Awwaam . Her role in supporting the Prophet and her examples of sacrifice and forbearance are ever-alive in the annals of Islamic History. She was named 'Dhat an-Nitaqayn' (the One with the Two Waistbands) due to an incident in which she used two waistbands in order to tie food for the Prophet and her father Abu Bakr . They had left Makkah for Madinah and were being pursued by the enemy. It was Asma 's job to deliver this food to them with the utmost secrecy; late into her pregnancy she climbed up Mount Thawr. For those who aren't acquainted with this Mount it should suffice for you to know that even the youth are caught gasping for breath when climbing its rocky tracks. What drove Asma , with her unborn, to undertake such a dangerous journey? It was no other than the deep love she had for the Prophet and her father. Later, when Abu Jahl came to the house of Abu Bakr , full of rage and anger he asked Asma the whereabouts of her father and the Noble Messenger . Standing strong, with *eemaan* flowing through every inch of her being, she replied that she did not know. He slapped her across her face; she stood strong and unyieldingly with a heart full of love for this *deen*.

Her love did not end with the demise of Rasoolullah ; on the contrary, she ignited this deep love into the hearts of her children and grandchildren. One such grandchild that benefited greatly from her company was no other than Fatimah bint al Mundhir . Allah chose Fatimah to be a light whose name would shine - even today -in the books of *Ahaadeeth*.

Fatimah bint al Mundhir is respected as one of the leading *ta'biaat*[2] of her time. She was a great scholar and was renowned as a *Faqeehah* (Jurist) and was married to her cousin Hishaam ibn 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr . Hishaam was also a great scholar and narrator. Some of his leading students included: Imam Abu Hanifah , Imam Malik , Shu'bah and Sufyan al-Thawri .[3]

Although they were both cousins, Hishaam had not acquired from Asma the many *ahaadeeth* of the Prophet that Fatimah had acquired from Asma . Hence, he would ask his wife and learn from her the words of the Prophet , memorising them and in turn informing his companions and students of what is wife had taught him. Many have narrated from Fatimah , such as Muhammad ibn Ishaaq (the author of one very famous book of Seerah) and others, yet her husband Hishaam comes as one of the leading figures narrating directly from Fatimah .

Below are just a few examples from the major and unanimously accepted books of ahaadeeth, in which Hishaam narrated directly from his wife Fatimah .



1. **Hishaam** narrated from **his wife Fatimah** from **her grandmother Asma'** that she said: 'A woman came to the Messenger of Allah and said: 'O Messenger of Allah – I have a daughter who is a bride: she has a disease (*hasbah*) that has thinned her hair. Can I join [another's hair] to it? The Messenger of Allah said: The curse of God is on the one who joins [another's hair in this way] and the one who asks for this [joining another's hair to her daughter's.]

   This hadeeth is narrated in:
   - **Saheeh al Bukhari**
   - **Muslim**
   - **Al-Nas'ai**
   - **Ibn Majah**

2. **Hishaam** says: '**Fatimah** narrated to me from **Asma'** that she said: 'We ate meat of one of our horses in the time of the Prophet (saws)'

   This hadeeth is narrated in:
   - **Saheeh al Bukhari**
   - **Muslim**
   - **Al-Nas'ai**
   - **Ibn Majah**

3. **Hishaam** narrates from **Fatimah** from **Asma'** that she said: The Messenger of Allah said to me: Give [of your wealth], spend [from it] and pay out; do not cling to it, otherwise Allah will hold it over you; do not count [it] otherwise Allah will count it over you.'

   This hadeeth is narrated in:
   - **Saheeh al Bukhari**
   - **Muslim**
   - **Al-Nas'ai**

4. Hishaam also narrated from her the long hadeeth found in the Saheehs of Al-Bukhari and Muslim, about the prayer on the occasion of the solar eclipse.

For some of the most leading scholars of Islaam, the likes of Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim , to record these *Ahaadeeth*, in which:

1. Women have narrated the hadeeth
2. A man has narrated from his wife.

holds great lessons for those who claim that the Scholars of Islaam were misogynist and andocentric. On the contrary, the very books that are considered the most reliable sources of Islaamic knowledge contain *ahaadeeth* that contain chains which bear the names of women. Further, these examples bear sufficient proof that men would, without embarrassment, narrate from their wives openly.

Was it not for Hishaam رحمه الله, who learnt from Fatimah, رحمها الله who learnt from Asma رضي الله عنها, we may have been bereft of these beautiful pearls of wisdom that were extracted from the sea of Prophethood.

The Daughter of Saeed ibn al Mussayib

I now present to you the example of the granddaughter of the great Companion Abu Hurayrah رضي الله عنه. Abu Hurayrah رضي الله عنه had married his daughter to the illustrious *taabi'ee* Sa'eed ibn al Musayyib رحمه الله. From this blessed marriage, Allah gifted Sa'eed رحمه الله with a pious and knowledgeable daughter.

When time came to get his daughter married, Sa'eed ibn al Musayyib رحمه الله chose for her one of his students called Abdullah; Abdullah stood out from the rest as his sincerity in seeking knowledge was clearly visible.

Abdullah's love for knowledge can be seen in the fact that the very next day after his marriage to the daughter of Saeed ibn al Musayyib رحمه الله he was putting on his cloak to go out, when his new bride asked him,

> Where are you going?

He said:

> To the assembly of Sa'eed to attain knowledge.

She رحمها الله said to him:

> **Sit here, I will teach you the knowledge of Sa'eed.**[4]

Hence she رحمها الله taught him from her knowledge. For one month, `Abdullah did not attend Sa'eed ibn al Musayyib's رحمه الله circle because the knowledge that this beautiful young girl had learned from her father (which she was passing on to him) was sufficient.

It is important to ask ourselves the question – if Muslim Women did possess this kind of knowledge over their husbands today, would it increase them in respect and obedience towards their husbands or would this knowledge become a source of many marital problems? The greatness of these women was such that their knowledge only increased them in obedience and respect for their husbands.

The following statement from the husband of this great female scholar suffices us in understanding the sort of love her husband possessed for her due to her knowledge and obedience,

> **“She was among the most beautiful people, and most expert of those who know the Book of God by heart, and most knowledgeable of the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ, and most aware of the right of the husband.’**[5]

May Allah عزّ وجلّ make the mothers, sisters and daughters attain such a status in the eyes of their husbands by their knowledge, obedience and love for this deen. Ameen

Fatimah bint Muhammad ibn Ahmad

We are now going to meet one of the greatest *Faqeehah* (woman-scholar of Islamic Jurisprudence) of her time. She was renowned for her grounded knowledge of Hanafi Jurisprudence and was no other than the daughter of the great scholar and jurist, Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abu Ahmad `Ala' al-Din al-Samarqandi رحمه الله, whose book ‘Tuhfat al Fuqaha’ is well-known by the scholars and students of knowledge. Not only did she learn Fiqh from her father, but she memorised his book ‘Tuhfat al Fuqaha’.

Being a jurist in itself is no small matter; one needs to be well-acquainted with the Qur’aanic verses, *ahaadeeth* of the Prophet ﷺ and the principles of the *madhab* they wish to base their ruling on. Further they need to have knowledge of the circumstances and needs of the contemporary world. Her knowledge was such that it exceeded her husbands, who would consult her for her opinions, especially when he erred in passing a fatwaa. Her name was Fatimah bint Muhammad ibn Ahmad رحمها الله and her father had married her to ‘Alaa’ al Din Abu Bakr ibn Mas’ud al-Kasaani رحمه الله, who was highly distinguished in the fields of al-usul and al-furu'. He wrote a commentary on Tuhfat al-fuqaha' entitled Bada'i` al-sana'i`, and showed it to his Shaykh (the father of Fatimah), who was delighted with it and accepted it as a *mahr* (dowry) for his daughter, although he had refused offers of marriage for her from some of the kings of Byzantium. The *fuqaha'* of his time said, "He commentated on his Tuhfah and married his daughter."

Before her marriage, Fatimah used to issue *fatwas* (religious edicts and verdicts) along with her father, and the *fatwas* would be written in her handwriting and that of her father. After she married the author of al-Bada'i`, the *fatwas* would appear in her handwriting and that of her father and her husband. Her husband would make mistakes, and she would correct them.[6] Ibn al-‘Adim says,

> ‘My father narrated that she used to quote the *Hanafi madhab* (doctrine) very well. **Her husband al-Kasaanee sometimes had some doubts and erred in the [issuing of a] *fatwa*; then she would tell him the correct opinion and explain the reason for [his] mistake.**’[7]

Surprised? But, as we will come to see, there were many like Fatimah bint Muhammad رحمها الله who would follow her footsteps in the coming centuries.

Maryam bint Jahsh

Muslim women excelled, not only Fiqh, Ahaadeeth and Tafseer but also in other Islamic Sciences. One such example is of Maryam bint Jahsh رحمها الله, who lived in the 4th Century; she was an expert of the language in which Allah عزّ وجلّ chose to reveal the Qur'aan.

She was married to the great Yemeni scholar Jamaal al-Deen 'Ali ibn Abee l-Fawaaris al-Hamdani رحمه الله. Not only was it due to her knowledge of the Arabic language, but also the acuteness of her mind, that Maryam bint Jahsh رحمها الله was able to subtly resolve a difficult point for her husband.

Her husband had been engaged in debate with some adherents of a sect called Murji'i. Their heresy was such that they believed that as long as one had faith in their heart, regardless of what they commits with the limbs, faith by itself will secure their salvation. Her husband, Ali رحمه الله, quoted the end of verse 40 of Surah al-A'raaf:

"….Indeed those who belie our signs (*ayaat*) and disdain them – for them the gates of the heaven will not be opened, nor will they enter the Garden, until the camel passes through the eye of the needle."

The Murji'I who was debating said "This is easy for God, with his power, if He wills, *He passes the camel through the eye of the needle.*' When 'Ali returned home his mind was still preoccupied and at he could not sleep during the night. His wife, Maryam رحمها الله asked him what was wrong; after he explained to her what the matter was she said on sentence that gave Ali رحمه الله not only a good nights sleep, but a very good nights sleep. She said,

' In the verse of the Qur'aan *the camel* is the subject [of the verb], not the object.'

Fatimah bint Yahya

Fatimah bint Yahya رحمها الله was a great *Mujtahidah* of the 9th Century. A *Mujtahidah* (which is the female conjugation for *Mujtahid)* is a scholar of great calibre who can deduce from the sources of Islamic law. In turn they use these deductions to give rulings in accord with both the contemporary and individual needs of the society. For one to be given the title '*Mujtahidah',* one must have knowledge on both the consensus and opposing views of the Companions, the Successors, and the leading Scholars of Fiqh and *Mujtahidoon*. Hence, to be a *Mujtahidah* was not small matter, but Fatimah bint Yahya رحمها الله truly deserved it.

Such was her knowledge, that her father – who was also a great jurist with several students – would be questioned by Fatimah رحمها الله regarding several Juristic issues. The great scholar Al Shawkani رحمه الله says about her:

> 'She was most famous for her knowledge. She had debates with her father on several juristic issues. Her father, the imam, confirmed that Fatimah applied *ijtihaad* in deriving rulings. This indicates that she was prominent in the knowledge for the imam would not say something like that except for one who deserved it.'[8]

Her father married her to the scholar al-Mutahhar ibn Muhammad ibn Sulaymaan ibn Muhammad (d. 879). Al-Mutahhar رحمه الله was very lucky since whenever he would be confused on a matter he would refer to his wife for judgement on difficult juristic issues. Even within the midst of his students, when he would get stuck on a complicated issue, he would get up and head for the curtain, behind which the great *Mujtahidah* would be sitting.

When he would come back with the answer his students would say,

> 'This is not from you. This is from behind the curtain.'[9]

Amat al-Ghafoor bint Ishaaq al-Dihlawi

I end with one final example of a great *Muhaddithah,* a non-Arab, of the 13th Century.

'Non-Arab' is outlined because many feel that these great women were great only because they were lucky to have Arabic as their mother-tongue and ancestry was from the Arabs. On the contrary, many of our great scholars, even from among the men, the likes of Imam Bukhari, were not from the lineage of the Arabs. In the same way, the *Muhaddithah*, Amat al-Ghafoor bint Ishaaq al-Dihlawee رحمها الله, was from Delhi – India.

Her father was one of leading scholars of India and so she would learn from his company, covering many books of *hadeeth* and *fiqh* with him. In this way, she acquired high authority in both *hadeeth* and *fiqh*. Her father married her to a scholar; whenever he faced difficulty he would turn to his wife, Amat al-Ghafoor رحمها الله. Al Hasani says,

> When her husband, himself a great scholar, faced any difficulty in hadeeth or fiqh he consulted her and benefited from her.[10]

Truly this is a blessing that Allah blesses to whomsoever he wishes of his believing maid-servants.

Conclusion

For the sake of brevity I have only mentioned a few examples of women who taught their husbands. Yet, it is imperative for us to bear in mind that Muslim homes – especially in that day and age – were a domain of privacy and so *how* they studied together and *what* they studied has not been expounded on in detail. The few examples provided serve as clear indications of how women greatly contributed to the spread of Islamic knowledge *even* within their private domains.

Sisters lets bring back the legacies of our foremothers and compete with our husbands in the acquisition of knowledge, just as Allah said,

فَٱسْتَبِقُوا ٱلْخَيْرَٰتِ

“….Compete then with one another in doing good works...”

Qur’aan: Surah al Maaidah (5):48

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[1] Deen: Religion, the Religion of Islaam.
[2] Ta’biyaah is the female conjugation of the term ‘ta’bi’ee: someone who met a companion and not the Prophet ﷺ.
[3] Pg 143, Al-Muhaddithat: the women scholars of Islam by Mohammad Akram Nadwi.
[4] Abu Nu’aym, Hilyat al-awliyaa’, ii. 167-68.
[5] Abu Nu’aym, Hilyat al-awliyaa’, ii. 167-68.
[6] Tuhfat al-fuqaha', 1/12.
[7] ‘Abd al-Qaadir AL QURASHI, al-Jawaahir al-mudiyyah fi tabaqaar al-Hanafiyyah, iv. 4.
[8] Al- Shawkani, al-Badr al-taali’, ii. 24.
[9] Al-Hibashi, Mu’jam al-Nisa’ al-Yamaniyyaat, 149.
[10] Al Hasani, Nuzhat al-Khawaatir, vii.93.